

***C.A. Thayer* Stop**

#15 Sail, Steam, and Self-Reliance

You're listening to "Maritime Voices" from San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. I'm Ranger Mark Neuweld. In this episode, we'll consider the meanings connected with sailing ships and steam ships.

By the start of the 20th century, the Age of Sail was fading as the Age of Steam gained power. Manifesting this change, the steam tugboat *Hercules* towed the *C. A. Thayer* north from San Francisco in 1916. Perhaps the two captains talked about their ships and their lives at sea.

The captain of the *Hercules* must have been very proud of his triple expansion steam engine that enabled him to set a course directly into the prevailing northerly winds of the Pacific Coast. He may have been a bit smug in proclaiming that the passage would be twice as fast as a trip in which *Thayer* sailed under her own power. Undoubtedly, the power of his engine gave him confidence that they would not be tossed upon the rocks of the dangerous West Coast. With his chief engineer able to repair any problems, *Hercules* was completely self-reliant. To her captain, the rhythmic hum of her engine was a satisfying sound of speed and safety.

But for the captain of the *Thayer*, the steam engine was a noisy and smelly beast with a jangling vibration that ran through his feet and up his spine, making his head hurt. With a passionate glint in his eye, he would speak of feeling a sailing ship rocking under his feet and deeply inhaling the clean, salty breeze as if his life depended on it. Ah, the simple freedom of the winds of heaven! He had no desire to conquer nature with an engine. His power came from a direct connection with the water, sky, and stars, a self-reliance born of harmonizing with these familiar elements, of connecting with God. He must have sighed deeply with sadness in reflecting upon the fading future of the Age of Sail. Yet perhaps he took comfort in knowing that wind is limitless and free, and people will always yearn to feel the sea and sky.

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park preserves the *C.A. Thayer* as a link between our past, our present, and our future.